

6. COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL DATA UPDATE

According to National Standard 8 (NS 8), conservation and management measures should provide for the continued participation of a community and minimize the economic effects on the community. Complying with NS 8 is contingent upon the availability of community studies and profiles as well as regional economic analyses. Several new studies were summarized in the 2003 SAFE Report and new information will be included in Amendment 2 to the HMS FMP, currently under development. This section of the SAFE Report reviews the impact of significant regulatory measures enacted in the past year. For background information on guidelines for social impact assessment and the development of social information for the HMS FMP and Billfish Amendment, please see the 2003 SAFE Report.

6.1 Social Impacts of Selected 2003 Regulatory Actions

Emergency Rule to Implement Management Measures in the Atlantic Shark Fisheries Consistent with the 2002 Stock Assessments (67 FR 78990, December 27, 2002) and Extension (68 FR 31983; May 29, 2003).

These actions finalized an emergency rule and extension which expired on December 29, 2003, and implemented annual quotas for the commercial ridgeback and non-ridgeback large coastal shark fisheries and the commercial small coastal shark fishery. The emergency regulations also suspended the regulation regarding the commercial ridgeback large coastal shark minimum size. These actions were not expected to have negative socio-economic impacts for fishermen because they were of limited duration, and the quotas were established at recent landings levels. Since the minimum size requirement had never gone into place, its suspension was not expected to negatively impact fishermen. In fact, the final action to suspend the commercial minimum size promotes safety by not forcing fishermen to fish further offshore in order to catch fish that meet the minimum size requirement. The remaining actions in this rule were not expected to cause fishermen to fish in an unsafe manner. For further background information, please see the Environmental Assessment and associated Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis for this emergency rule, available from the HMS Division of NOAA Fisheries or at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/hmsdocuments.html#shark>.

Final Rule to Reduce Discards of, and Modify the Target Catch Requirements for Pelagic Longline Vessels Retaining Incidental Catch of Atlantic Bluefin Tuna (68 FR 32414; May 30, 2003).

In this action, NOAA Fisheries amended regulations governing incidentally caught Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) in the Atlantic pelagic longline fishery. The intent of the action was to minimize dead discards of BFT and improve management of the Atlantic pelagic longline fishery. Specifically, target catch requirements were adjusted in all areas, at all times, to 2,000 lbs. (907 kg) to retain one incidentally caught BFT, 6,000 lbs. (2,722 kg) to retain two BFT, and 30,000 lbs (66,138 kg) to retain three BFT. The regulations also moved the boundary line between the northern and southern areas and allocated a percentage of the quota to each area; and established a degree of inseason adjustment authority for BFT retention limits. These actions are

expected to have positive economic and social effects on longline fishermen. The action increases the opportunity for retention of truly incidentally caught BFT while avoiding a targeted fishery for this species. The change to the north-south boundary and addition of inseason adjustment authority will help minimize closures and confusion, which will also result in positive effects on fishermen. The actions in this rule would not require fishermen to fish in an unsafe manner. For further background information, please see the Environmental Assessment and associated Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis for this rule available from the HMS Division of NOAA Fisheries or at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/hmsdocuments.html#tuna>.

Final Rule Implementing Amendment 1 to the Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Tunas, Swordfish, and Sharks and the Atlantic Shark Commercial Quotas and Fishing Season for the First 2004 Semiannual Fishing Season (68 FR 74746; December 24, 2003)

This action implements reductions in commercial quotas, trimester seasons, regional quotas, vessel monitoring system (VMS) requirements, and a time/area closure that would likely result in economic and social impacts to the fishery as a whole, some of which may be significant for vessel owners. However, all of these alternatives, when compared to the other alternatives considered, mitigate undesirable or greater economic impacts associated with continued overfishing, shortened seasons, bycatch of vulnerable species, and economic instability of fishery participants and associated fishing communities in the long-term. The combination of these preferred alternatives is necessary for the large coastal shark complex (LCS) to rebuild and the small coastal shark complex (SCS) to achieve optimum yield.

In order to mitigate some of the socio-economic impacts, NOAA Fisheries will delay effectiveness of trimester seasons, VMS requirements, and the time/area closure in order to give fishermen time to (1) purchase VMS units, (2) work with dealers to enhance market prices and plan out advertising strategies with grocers, and (3) prepare and plan for the closure. Furthermore, NOAA Fisheries re-evaluated and refined the size of the proposed time/area closure.

In terms of safety, the preferred alternatives described in Amendment 1 to the HMS FMP will not require fishermen to fish in an unsafe manner. Additionally, the alternatives that require the use of VMS and remove the commercial minimum size limit help to promote the safety of life at sea. In general, NOAA Fisheries urges fishermen to use caution, but cannot control what individual fishermen do in response to the time/area closure or other final actions in this rule. For more information, please see Amendment 1 to the HMS FMP.

